

Treatable Causes of Memory Loss

Many older adults suffer from memory loss but never receive proper medical attention because of the belief that it is a normal part of the aging process. More than 70 medical conditions have symptoms that mimic Alzheimer's disease and may cause memory problems. Below are a few of the more common, treatable conditions. Early diagnosis and treatment could improve memory.

Medical Causes of Memory Loss

- **Poor Nutrition:** Body chemistry can become imbalanced from eating meals lacking the full range of necessary nutrients. Vitamin B12 is particularly important for cognitive functioning.
- **Dehydration:** Many people do not drink enough fluids, or they consume primarily caffeinated beverages, which flush fluids out of the body.
- **Fluctuation in Blood Sugar:** People who develop diabetes later in life may go for years without realizing they should ask their physician to check their blood sugar.
- **Thyroid Deficiency:** Thyroid functioning can be checked by a physician and remedied with medication.
- **Infection:** Urinary tract or bladder infections are the most common infections, but any infection can cause memory loss. Urinary infections in older adults are known to cause pronounced confusion and agitation.
- **Medication Combinations:** Taking multiple pills every day can result in mix-ups or medication interactions. Reviewing your medication list with a trusted doctor or pharmacist can rule out this cause.
- **Medication Toxicity:** Occasionally, too much medication accumulates in the blood, causing confusion and other symptoms. For example, Digoxin (Lanoxin) is a heart medication, which can become toxic.
- **Sensory Losses:** Loss of hearing or sight may interfere with orientation to time and place.
- **Lung Disease:** Decreased lung capacity may mean insufficient oxygen to the brain. Memory loss may completely resolve when the person receives oxygen treatments.
- **Cancer:** Tumors in the brain, liver, or other organs can lead to memory loss. Prompt diagnosis may mean that the tumor can be removed or reduced through treatment.
- **Sleep Apnea:** Impaired breathing while sleeping may mean insufficient oxygen to the brain. Memory loss may completely resolve when sleep apnea is properly treated.



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Mental/Emotional Causes of Memory Loss

- **Depression:** Some people lose interest in others and become confused when they get depressed. Antidepressant medication may help significantly.
- **Grief:** Facing a significant loss can cause “brain fog” or noticeable forgetfulness.
- **Untreated Mental Illness:** Some mental illnesses have symptoms that overlap with dementia symptoms, such as paranoia or changes in mood.

Other Causes of Memory Loss

- **Carbon Monoxide:** Furnaces sometimes malfunction and leave carbon monoxide in the air, producing confusion and sleepiness. Fixing the furnace may restore alertness. Installing carbon monoxide detectors can alert to future leaks.

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